

Questioning Methods of Nollywood Studies

Añulika Agina

Pan-Atlantic University, Lagos, Nigeria

Introduction

The focus of this chapter is to raise questions that encourage debate about the existing methods brought to bear on Nollywood. My entry into the discussion on Nollywood scholarship, particularly the methodological discussion and debate, if such a thing exists is informed first by Jackie Stacey's suggestion regarding methodological questions, which "need to be debated in film studies because without such a debate the politics of knowledge remain hidden and mystified" (Stacey 1998:261-262). The second inspiration is due to the experience gained and problems encountered during my doctoral studies. The research experience was complicated by a methodological impasse, a situation which provided no immediate solution to the problem of examining the reception in 2014 of films made between 2001 and 2013. The existing textual analyses that dominated academic literature on Nollywood provided marginal information on audience and reception studies.

To describe the second situation more precisely, my thesis titled *Nigerian filmmakers and their construction of a political past (1967-1998)* examined the intervention of filmmakers in the historical and political discourse of the Nigerian State. It probed the motivation of popular filmmakers, who were formerly criticised for being apolitical, in taking up political themes. Also examined were the narrative techniques employed in reconstructing the past, the political ideology promoted or subverted in the films and the critical reception of the films by various audiences. Responding to the questions of motivation, narrative techniques and ideology were accomplished through interviews of producers and directors as well as post-structuralist analyses of the films. But the last question on critical reception proved unanswerable at first (without any form of mediation). Among scholars, only Haynes wrote brief commentaries alluding to the films as political critiques (Haynes, 2006); and among journalists, Steve Ayorinde and Shaibu Husseini produced newspaper articles that by 2014 were irretrievably lost in the archives of *The Guardian* (personal communication). Absent from existing scholarship was the reception of films made in the past. This revealed the limits of the methods of enquiry, particularly those of textual analyses which currently dominate the literature.

My approach in this paper, therefore, is to examine some of methodological approaches within key texts such as *Nigerian Video Films* (2000), *African Video Films Today* (2003), *Signal and Noise* (2008), *Viewing African Cinema* (2010), *Global Nollywood* (2013), *The Rhetoric of Culture in Nollywood* (2013) and *Nollywood Stars* (2015). Without dismissing the

now-numerous journal articles and book chapters that the scholarship on the film industry has attracted, the paper aims to address the limitations of existing methods, to initiate a debate on triangulation of methods and hopefully to open up deeper discussions on methodological questions. Some of the questions have been asked, and many others are yet to be addressed. Haynes attests to the lack of debate (of whatever kind) among scholars in the discipline when he claims that “[T]he geographical and disciplinary dispersions of those studying the videos are partially responsible for the relative absence of debates” (2010:107).

The paper does not propose a singular or uniform approach to unpacking the multi-layered meanings in film texts or those ‘decodable’ by audiences for there isn’t one solution to this impasse; rather, it calls for a more inclusive and triangulated approach to the narratives surrounding and embedded in the films. This, it is hoped, will yield robust insights to our understanding of the films in ways not previously acknowledged. To achieve this, I examine at length the dominance of textual analysis and its limits, and briefly, other qualitative approaches and their contributions to production histories as well as the existing quantitative reception studies. The merits of the various approaches are highlighted just as the shortcomings themselves become glaring before any critical scrutiny.

The dominance and limits of textual analyses

Stacey (1993) is clear in ascribing the dominance of textual analysis in film studies to the “debt that film studies owes to its humanities-based counterpart, literary studies, which has itself seldom investigated methodological questions” (p. 260). Without prejudice, textual analysis appears to be a more straightforward and inherited research approach to film studies, particularly from a humanities perspective since it entails repeated viewing and the application of some critical interpretive framework to that specific film(s). The analyst needs no assistance from other parties save the purchase of the film(s). Hence, it is not only convenient but also attractive to scholars who either by compulsion or sheer interest have to publish papers for career growth. Stacey further observes that “[T]he ease of conducting textual analysis certainly compares favourably with the uncertainties and practical problems of audience research: almost invariably, the former is more straightforward, less time-consuming and more manageable” (p. 263). But even if Nollywood scholarship seems dominated by textual analyses, an attitude which Stacey, writing in a different context refers to as “textual obsessions”, the approach is beneficial to our deeper understanding of popular films.

Textual analysis of Nollywood films gives the range of meanings derivable from a film text. It affords an interpretive toolkit that provides the necessary equipment for grasping through the media (film) how Nigerians and indeed Africans see the world and their position within the world, as articulated in their films. Textual analysis as a form of close reading of films

aims primarily to uncover meanings and communicate insights in ways not immediately visible, thus reaching deeper than mere entertainment or enjoyment of a film. In uncovering the benefits of textual analysis, I align my thoughts to those of Barry Brummett in his argument on close reading, which is ultimately what the analysts of texts do. Textual analysis “reveals meanings that are shared but not universally and also meanings that are known but not articulated” (Brummett, 2010: 17). The approach permits a nuanced appreciation of the filmic codes and stylistic choices deployed in any film. It opens up knowledge boundaries and unearths the peculiarities of directorial choices. Of Sembene’s *Borom Sarret*, Ukadike (2013) claims that “a closer examination reveals a uniqueness that is non-Western, non-European and non-conventional, signalling a different mode of representation, and introducing indigenous aesthetics” (p. 19). Textual analysis thus democratizes knowledge and the filmmaker’s worldviews in the sense that it allows meanings to be created and recreated, even appropriated from film texts by analysts. Nollywood scholars probe subtexts and latent epistemologies to extend or reverse, for instance, what Okome (2013) calls the “colonial episteme about African people” (p. 144).

In spite of the rich meanings derived through theoretical analyses of films, the problems associated with a sole method of enquiry could be limiting in creating the same knowledge which the method seeks to expand. The more I reflect on this paper, the more I see clearly how a ‘hegemony’ of textual analysis has been maintained over decades, not only in African films, but also in American ones as Stacey makes us appreciate. It is necessary though that such a limiting discourse be questioned and broadened to accommodate a plethora of methodological options. One of the glaring problems of textual analyses regarding Nollywood films is the random and haphazard selection of films to be analysed. Given that access to the films often poses a problem, which in part explains the haphazard selections, scholars tend to shroud the rationale for their choices. As argued by Haynes (2010), sometimes films are selected with “no attempt to situate the films, explaining and justifying their selection and their representative character” (p.12). This convenient sampling also fosters a lack of reflectivity among scholars.

While describing the thematic and ideological persuasions of Nollywood films, Haynes attempts an explanation of the dominance of textual analysis:

These are the easiest sorts of analysis to produce, in the sense that they do not depend on extensive prior background, the ability to travel to do fieldwork, access to a comprehensive selection of films, and so on. Such are the conditions under which most of us work, and as the collectively generated description of the video phenomenon becomes more extensive, solid, and dependable, the need for direct personal experience is lessened (Haynes 2010:12)

Contrary to Haynes' claim, the personal experience of a film analyst cannot be limited to the film text alone, but must exhibit tolerance for "the so many human intersections and interactions that film art encompasses" without "some intriguing narrowness of analysis" (Harper, 2012: xiv). Such narrowness ignores questions about filmmakers' motivations, cinema audiences and critical reception, institutional, industrial production and distribution contexts.

The benefits of textual analysis have been identified above; it is equally necessary to highlight its boundaries as well. First, no interpretive framework – historical, socio-economic, political or cultural – is able to respond to all the possibilities of meaning creation in a film since each focuses on certain properties of the film and ignores others.

Most of the articles in the edited volume *Nigerian Video Films* are analyses of film texts that typify societal changes and postcolonial pressures. Okome's chapter on the film *Onome*, and Garritano's feminist readings of *Hostages* and *Dust to Dust* are examples. Foluke Ogunleye's (2003) edited volume, *African Video Film Today* presents several essays of what might be called textual rendering, mere presentations of plot summaries. Little analyses are evident in the essays. Even a title that suggests some audience work, *Nigerian home video films and the Congolese audience: A similarity of cultures* by Ngoloma Katsuva is a misnomer for more textual rendering. The author writes about an audience that the reader does not encounter, but who must be seen through his own lens. More incongruous both in method and in argumentation is Popoola's essay, *Nigeria and the challenges of violent video films*. The author's textual rendering of 'violent' films made between 2001 and 2003 is linked to prison statistics of 1989 to 1993 without showing how exposure to such films is responsible for crimes committed even before the release of the films. This anachronism severely undermines the argument in Popoola's chapter and suggests a more reflective methodological approach to decoding the representations of violence in films and their effects on the audience. Furthermore, the essays are silent on the producers and directors, at best only naming them, without identifying the motivation or the processes of construction. However, one author in the same collection, Moradewun Adejunmobi, makes direct reference to interviews with Nigerian Tunde Kelani and Ghanaian Veronica Quarshie. The volume has its merits as one of the early book length contributions to Nollywood scholarship, but more is required if scholars are to go beyond "textual obsessions": textual analyses and renderings.

Second, the success of textual analysis is dependent on the researcher's skill both in choosing the film texts to be analysed and in giving a compelling rationale for that choice as well as the set of analytical frameworks applied to the film text. And Haynes (2010) has pointed out the limitations of Nigerian universities and scholars in film studies, even though non-Africans are also engaged in discussing the films. That this approach is subjective is not the major drawback; rather it is the conferral of properties in one film on several others, and the elevation of that film as the archetype that proves to be more problematic. Larkin's (2008)

classification of *Glamour Girls* and two others as Southern Nigerian films that “take the grotesque away from the ... postcolonial dictator and place it back inside the family” (p. 184) is a hasty generalisation that equates the analyses of two or three texts to an entire collection. The totalising assumption that the films are undifferentiated in terms of the “aesthetics of outrage” is questionable. In reading the southern Nigerian films that construct the country’s past such as *Across the Niger* and *Stubborn Grasshopper*, one is immediately confronted with the mildness with which troublesome political histories are treated. Yet, Larkin’s work is deep and sophisticated owing to his multidisciplinary approach, which pushes his interests beyond texts to “the conditions of possibility that allow texts to have meaning” (p. 14)

A third limit of textual analysis is that it fails to respond to audience and reception questions, which complete the history of any film, and which filmmakers need to remain in the business of filmmaking. The relationship between the audience and the text is largely ignored by this method (Stacey, 1993), except of course for the audience-researcher. Worthy of note is that no amount of textual analyses can offer explanations for exactly what people have in their heads. Textual analysis equally fails to respond to reception of films made in the past about the past. I do not overlook the different disciplinary approaches that concern themselves with texts and with audiences. The argument is that films are made by people for people; and these groups of people are intrinsic to our understanding of how texts mean. They constitute, in Larkin’s words, part of the “conditions of possibility”. Obviously, these limitations suggest that other approaches need to be combined with textual analysis in order to rightly demonstrate not only how films ‘represent’ but also how such polysemic texts are received and consumed.

Of Creators (Film Directors and Producers)

In the existing body of scholarly literature on this subject, the creators of the video films are often neglected and treated in isolation, rather than as voices that round out theoretical or methodological arguments on particular films. This seems to evoke the 1970s death of the author that characterised literary studies of the period. The publication of interviews with filmmakers, though marginal, is gaining grounds. The works of Frank Ukadike (2002), Jonathan Haynes (2007) and Uzoma Esonwanne (2008) readily come to mind. They are useful documents on filmmakers’ thoughts, motivations, filmmaking approaches and in general, the structure of the industries they operate in. Such interviews have within them historical relevance because they contribute to the assembling even writing of a presently-disjointed Nigerian film history. Other scholars conduct interviews in the pursuit of different research objectives and report same by embedding salient comments within the body of their articles or as footnotes (Adejunmobi, 2003; Haynes, 2006; Larkin, 2008; Jedlowski, 2013; Okome, 2013). Haynes (2010) observed that “Studies of production structures often feature a

single filmmaker, but the intent is normally to take him or her as typical rather than as a unique creative individual” (p. 13). This would lead to further questioning of the approach that fails to recognise individual filmmakers for who they are and refrain from taking each as a spokesman for all. A major drawback of this method is that it ignores the colourations of self-reporting, hence underlying the argument for triangulated approaches. There cannot be a single grand narrative to unpacking industry formation and practices even if such narratives are rendered by the most competent of filmmakers. Instead, robust even conflicting narratives allow the researcher to tease out the undertones and silences that attempt to complete the accounts.

Haynes (2010) also points out that “the academic literature on the videos risks being accused of perpetuating ... condescending methods, attitudes, and assumptions, as it typically identifies films by bare title alone, as if the films creators had no intellectual property rights that need to be recognized and respected” (p. 14). Beyond the desired recognition for directors’ credit, and the interviews of directors and producers presented as transcribed text, there is a further need to embed relevant and copious directorial views in literature that tends to deal with film texts in isolation. Some of such views often tend to corroborate existing knowledge about the films, but a few others challenge popular wisdom and provide insights to production histories. In Garritano (2000) and other contributors to *Nigerian Video Films* that the filmmaker’s name (director or producer) is often excluded from the analysis of the films, not to mention their cultural background, experience and motivation for making the films in the first place. In works that deny the origins of the films, generalisations abound, which in part explains the commercialisation motive ascribed to Nollywood filmmakers. How many filmmakers have been asked why they make films and how many reported in scholarly works? How many have corroborated the “commerce-driven” industry that scholars and analysts imposed on them? Might it not be that scholars too are guilty of the stereotypes they seek to uncover in their readings of films when they silence the creators of these films and give voice to their preferred readings of texts? Existing approaches on the ‘death of the author’ suppose that the text is superior; that the filmmaker’s background is irrelevant and has no influence on the final cut of the film being analysed. The ascribed supremacy of the text in Nollywood studies whether of theoretical or methodological import undeniably limits the range of interpretation possible for a given film text, while equally excluding the voices of creators and spectators of the video films.

Famous filmmaker, Charles Novia’s account on the production of one of his films is not only instructive, but also subverts the commerce-driven mantra touted by scholars and critics. He wrote of a script which he “skilfully wrapped...round a romantic tale” (p. 55) in a subversive manner:

The script was motivated by the senseless murder of Ken Saro-Wiwa and other pro-democracy activists ...that November evening in 1995. A tyrant,

bereft of literary intellect and appreciation, had murdered a kindred spirit! To me, he did not deserve to be hanged. Something in me rebelled that evening. I cannot quite put a finger to what it was but it gave vent to an anger which was only doused when I wrote the *I will die for you* script eight years later...the rebellion to poke fingers at the government of my country, both past and present, swelled up in me (Novia 2012: 53).

A form of political protest, which is seldom documented, explains the filmmaker's motivation. Similarly, the producer of *Across the Niger*, Kingsley Ogoro pointed out that his quest for excellence drove him into filmmaking because as he attests himself, "*I observed the motion picture industry and realised that more was needed to raise the ante*" (K. Ogoro, personal communication, August 23, 2013). Ogoro believed himself to be the custodian of the talent and leadership the film industry needed at the time of his entry. His film was also a call for peace in war-torn Nigeria of 1967. Ogoro is businessman and filmmaker whose livelihood is not dependent on revenue from filmmaking. Another popular filmmaker, Zeb Ejiro, reports that societal factors inspire his films.

What motivates me actually is my environment... I am angry. I'm still angry with my government... Whenever you see me carry my camera, it is because I am not happy with what is going on. Any day you see me set out to make a movie, that means there's something bothering me that I want to tell the world. We are going to make movies that are going to change Nigeria. I don't care whether we go to jail. (Personal communication, July 25, 2013).

The responses below equally fit neatly into this category of filmmakers unmotivated by commerce, but by pressing societal problems. Regarding *Anini*, Fred Amata, the director was eager to *make a statement about the political situation in the country: the same police that gives you arms to rob are hounding you for robbery...* (personal communication, February 16, 2012). Henry Legemah, producer of the same film wanted to *portray the military government as they are: aloof and corrupt* (June 2, 2014). And Sam Onwuka produced *Stubborn Grasshopper* after General Sani Abacha's death *because we were not getting the actual story of how Nigerian government was actually running at that time...a lot of things were covered up. So I chose to enlighten people about the dark military operations* (October 16, 2013). The inclusion of these testimonies challenges a dominant paradigm that has trailed the description of Nollywood for over two decades. Granted that financial imperatives are not incompatible with activist or social responsibility motives for film production, the comments above are indicative of non-commercial interests among filmmakers, which are considered valuable in analysing the films of those producers and directors.

Several Nollywood scholars address film texts in complete ignorance of the backgrounds and intentions of the producers of such titles as if the character and personality of the filmmaker

did not influence the narrative and technical choices that realised the film. I argue against such an approach because it does not differ intellectually from a lay person's reading of films. As a critical and intellectual exercise, it is far more fruitful to interrogate, not just film, but also all art forms with sufficient background information of the creators because that knowledge reveals the rationale behind artistic decisions, actions and inactions.

Does Incorporating Audiences Matter too?

This paper has tried to problematise the existing methods of creating knowledge about and around Nollywood and possibly to open up debates for retooling. If the voices of filmmakers matter, not in isolation, but in the discourses of their cultural products, then those for whom the films are made ought also to be relevant in the scheme of things. As Okome (2007) pointed out, "understanding the multiple dimensions of this audience is indispensable to the goal of problematizing ways in which knowledge is constructed, used, or circulated, dispensed and re-invented in Africa" (p. 6). An anecdotal experience supports the claim that audiences count for the filmmaker's practice and the distributors as well. Following the controversy that trailed the Nigerian premiere of *Half of a Yellow Sun* in August 2014, this author contacted Film House cinemas for permission to conduct a mini-survey on their facility on the first day of release. The management was cautious in granting permission, but eventually did on the condition that the results of the survey would be shared with them. They too were interested in understanding what and why people enjoyed watching what they watched.

One of the important and recent studies of spectators, audiences and Nollywood's mobility within and beyond Africa is *Global Nollywood* (2013). This edited volume by Krings and Okome is a fine collection that marries textual analysis with 'rich' ethnographic studies of diasporic Africans and other audiences. As a reception study sharing commonalities with *Viewing African Cinema* (2011), an earlier publication, it attempts to claim Nollywood's collaborative practices within global production and screening opportunities. It attributes Nollywood's restless and experimental mobility to the demands of globalisation, which is simultaneously "in tune with the postcolonial conditions of its continent" (Krings and Okome, 2013 p. 16). In spite of being a reception study on the whole, there is still a heavy dose of textual renderings and analyses in Haynes, Okome, Bryce, Santanera, Adamu and Ajibade's chapters. But *Global Nollywood* commands attention as the first book length contribution of Nollywood's trajectory beyond the shores of its own continent, thereby making it a subtle complementary text to its precursor *Viewing African Cinema*.

What can audiences as diverse as those viewing Nollywood films bring to the understanding of a text that textual analyses remain incapable of? As already argued by Stacey (1993), there can be no single meaning decodable from a text. How does one measure the reception of films made in 2001 or 2007 in 2014 in the Nigerian context where record-keeping and access

to information are fraught with multiple problems and bureaucracies? Will the interpretation of those films at their moments of release remain unchanged in 2014 when the study was conducted, assuming that the initial design of the research to invite film enthusiasts to watch and discuss them was feasible? Will even the analysis of one researcher in 2001 or 2007 remain unchanged in 2014? Generally, these questions reveal the limits of a single method of probing films and particularly, the boundaries of textual and con-textual analyses.

After reading the films and interviewing filmmakers in an attempt to round out my arguments on the historical and political persuasions of the films, it became obvious that a key component of communication was absent. Several methods of examining reception (critical film reviews written at release, interviews with cast and crew, film regulators and distributors, post-premiere screenings for captive audiences such as university students) available to me proved inadequate as I was immediately confronted with the drawbacks of each, and the loopholes of existing reception studies. For instance, Akpabio's (2007) survey of Lagos audiences reveals that while spectators generally complain about negative themes, they maintain a positive attitude towards the films by consistent patronage. Akpabio is careful at documenting methodological procedures, but fails to attend to a nagging question that confronts similar surveys (Agina, 2011) that is, the audience of which films is referred to? The experience of a previous study revealed that respondents based their responses on hearsay or snippets of unidentified films seen at different times and within a wide time frame, insufficient to aid recall and commentary. If that is the case for recent films, obviously, this approach is not suitable for assessing the audience of a film made in the past about the past.

Thus, McCall's (2004), Okome's (2007), Larkin's (2008), and Tsika's (2015) ethnographic approach to unpacking spectatorship and the sites of consumption offer a meaningful departure from surveys that raise more questions than they purport to answer. The locations of viewing are as important as the films given that the audience participate in manifold ways in the creation of knowledge about the films, about fellow viewers and their own social conditions. Undoubtedly these ethnographic approaches yield richer understanding not only for audience studies but also for texts and filmmakers. They provide the sort of avenues that filmmakers are wont to appreciate in (re)thinking future productions owing to the directness of interpretation and meaning exchange. A different though problematic kind of audience study was conducted by Innocent Uwah (2013). He exposed seven to eight solicited participants to 10 minutes screening of *Coronation* "to stimulate discussions" (p. 160) after administering question guides that had no mention of the film. His research agenda included eliciting audience responses, through focus group discussions, to notions of culture and communal living as depicted in the Igbo language film. This is a reductionist view of a film that equates a 10-minute experience to a full viewing experience for films the participants had previously not seen. As already stated above, the challenges of audience studies make them less attractive to scholars, but they offer incredible opportunities for uncovering how media shape thoughts and are shaped by those who consume them. It says something about the

difficulties encountered during my own doctoral studies when considering the reception of films made in the past about a distant past.

But the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel shone when I stumbled on the well-made assertion by Haynes (2010) on the possibility of journalists writing the history of the video films because they have been reporting the operations of the industry. I set to work interviewing film journalists and arts and culture editors selected through the snowball sampling technique. The result yielded copious accounts of film histories by people who wrote about the films upon release, took them to film festivals, attended their premiere and sometimes criticised the directors' technical failures. Their responses went from broad, general claims to specific comments on *Across the Niger*, *Anini* and *Stubborn Grasshopper*. It therefore became obvious that previously unacknowledged or peripheral comments from journalists could form the basis of a new approach to studying reception in the absence of film and textual archives.

In the preface to the Nigerian edition of *Nigerian Video Films* (2000), the first academic publication on the videos, Haynes wrote, "already two fairly substantial bodies of writing have grown up around the videos. One is the prolific newspaper reporting and reviewing, which provide an extensive and lively chronicle of the industry" (p. xvii). That statement answers a methodological question in this research, even if it raises other legitimate ones. Film journalists, arts and culture editors write and speak about the Nigerian film industry on a weekly basis. This mediated interview strategy, with its own drawbacks, proved to be not only a useful approach in understanding Nigerian video film audiences, but also, a rich source of information (snowballing) on the film industry itself. The study recognises the academic (and other) scepticism, which may result from the declining state of Nigerian journalism practice including the lack of requisite skill in writing about film and unethical compromises which journalists often have to make.

However, these considerations do not discredit the fact that this group of people know a lot about the film industry. One of the interviewees revealed to me the technical constraints he had regarding producing film reviews, but also added that critical reviews were not appreciated by his audience and editors (B. Njoku, personal communication, May 18, 2013). This point was corroborated by Nse Okon-ekong who noted that if he wrote critical reviews, his editor would "*ask me to go and start my own newspaper*" (N. Okon-ekong, personal communication, May 17, 2013). So, factors such as credibility, media ownership and leadership as well as technical abilities impinged on the intervention of the journalists as audiences. However, they proved to be a mine of information regarding film production and consumption in Nigeria, apart from being a pragmatic approach to interrogating audiences in the face of the challenges mentioned above.

In addition to these, the option of questioning journalists is legitimate because of the prominent roles they play. Film journalists maintain weekly and semi-weekly columns in Nigerian newspapers on the general state of the industry and of particular films and filmmakers. Most of them admitted to privileging actors' lifestyles over critical film reviews to satisfy the fans of the actors. Steve Ayorinde, Jahman Anikulapo and Shaibu Husseini sit on the jury of awards ceremonies like African Movie Academy Awards (AMAA). Most of the journalists attend film premieres at cinemas, and particularly private or press screenings so that they can gather news for their weekly columns. They attend film festivals all over Africa and elsewhere. Therefore, I consider their expert knowledge and closeness to the film industry sufficient basis for their contribution to my work. The socio-cultural contexts of the journalists' interpretation are taken into cognizance as an intervening element in speaking about the films and the industry.

The approach is not without its own drawbacks such as the intervention of memory over the years and subjective interpretation of the critical reception of a film. However, it is an approach that allows for inclusivity and triangulation (together with textual analysis and filmmaker interviews) in the methods of film analysis. Additionally, it mitigates a researcher's privileged readings, and the filmmaker's self-reporting, all of which may be tainted by biases of various kinds. While this approach responds to the reception of films made in the past about the past, another approach derived from the work of Ryan and Kellner (1988) offers opportunities for reception studies for films made and studied in the present: observation, informal questioning and survey of movie-theatre goers in the screening location.

The method of observing the behaviour of spectators who arrive the cinema to watch particular films in the style deployed by Ryan and Kellner (1988), the processes of ticket purchase, entry, viewing, exit of the cinema and administering questionnaire to viewers on exit provide robust details of reception beyond those of the box office takings in Nollywood. Like every survey, closed-ended questions are limiting, thus shutting the researcher out of observing the richness of non-verbal communication (Tracy, 2013). To overcome the generalities of previous reception studies (Akpabio, 2007; Esan, 2008) which match audiences against films they have not seen, the cinema ethnography approach requires researcher's familiarity with the film to be screened. This allows the researcher formulate questionnaire items that address key areas of research interest and viewing patterns. As demonstrated in the anecdote recorded above, it is a research approach that transcends the academia and provides useful data for filmmakers and film distributors.

An Inclusive Approach

My main argument in this paper is based on the premise that a multiplicity of factors interact in the life history of a film from its story concept to its premiere and beyond. These factors matter and the voices behind them are equally important in the overall appreciation, comprehension and analysis of the film.

The ultimate aim of this paper has been to raise questions about existing methods of Nollywood studies, and by doing that, to show the limitations of these approaches and claims. I suggest a rethinking of methods, a debate that challenges uncritical and isolated approaches in favour of one that is more inclusive and accommodating of several voices in the awareness that no singular approach can be exhaustively dealt with in any research paper or even book. And none can fully respond to all the questions pertaining to a film, and relevant to numerous stakeholders. Because film is not one thing but a combination of things: stories and techniques, people, culture, society, technology and more, it is necessary to be cautious of holding a textual-centric view of it.

The suggestion of a more inclusive and triangulated approach reduces some of the glaring shortcomings and dominance of one approach, a dominance which the author is often unaware of because of his own research agenda, and which might indicate an uncritical attitude and a lack of reflectivity on the researcher's part.

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